

**Sermon Notes:** December 21, 2025

**Focus:** Joseph's Dream and Marriage to Mary

[Lectionary Readings](#)

Every year I hear about Joseph and wonder what kind of rollercoaster he was on during his first year with Mary. He had to really get comfortable in his own skin, trust himself, and remain open to divine persuasion. After all that, he chose what would ultimately be good for his whole family and for himself.

Mary usually gets most of the praise, and rightfully so. She was a boss. However, we tend to swing between two caricatures of her: the ever-unstained, ever-holy, perfect woman, or the vulnerable naïf whom Jesus would eventually put in her place. As an Episcopalian, I don't groove on either.

I don't find myself compelled by the doctrines of the [Assumption of Mary](#) because she was too pure to die. I don't find myself compelled by the doctrines of the [Perpetual Virginity of Mary](#) because she was too holy to embrace her husband. You can tell me these are spiritual convictions, sure, but I think those convictions can separate us from her. What we really need is to understand her as a biblical giant. My admiration is for her spine of steel. I marvel at her courage to live in a world that demeaned her (and most women of her culture).

The flip side of Mary's caricature is an evangelical slant. I like *All I Want for Christmas Is My Two Front Teeth* **far more** than *Mary, Did You Know?* This song "put's Mary in her place." Even with Pentatonix doing a [beautiful cover](#), I can't stand the message. The lyrics are a litany of questions: Mary, did you know... that your baby boy would one day walk on water? Would save our sons and daughters? Give sight to the blind man? One day rule the nations?

The whole song is the string of questions. That string paints her as a clueless teenager along for the Messiah ride. But the Bible says that from the moment the angel speaks, Mary understands that she is part of a movement that topples rulers. She does not have every detail before saying yes, but she gladly opens the door to God. She welcomes the responsibility of raising a son who will break her heart and then unbreak it, repeatedly.

Joseph gets the also-ran role in the Christmas story. Partly because we know less about him than about Mary. Some traditions hold that he was much older than she was. Whatever his age, he endured sideways glances and spent much of his married life raising a child who was often too big for his britches. He had to have a steel spine too.

**Joseph had months, not days** to decide whether Mary would be his wife. We think of weddings as a five step dance: rehearsal, rehearsal dinner, wedding, reception, honeymoon. Jewish weddings were slow and deliberate. I want to devote the next page to a chart showing how Jewish weddings worked, and how Joseph and Mary's wedding likely unfolded. In that chart you will see God acting *after* legal commitment but *before* public celebration. God was asking Mary to bear the social cost first, and then Joseph would have to carry it with her.

The Christmas story begins in hiddenness, not spectacle. God enters the world in the fragile space between promise and fulfillment where trust costs something.

Merry almost Christmas. **Todd**

<i>Stage</i>	<i>Jewish Couple</i>	<i>Mary &amp; Joseph</i>
<b>Family negotiations</b>	Families agree to the match. bride price ( <i>mohar</i> ) is set.	Similarly arranged between Two families in Nazareth.
<b>Betrothal</b> <u><i>erusin</i></u>	Public act is a <b>legal marriage</b> but living apart.	Mary is legally Joseph's wife before conception is known.
<b>Betrothal</b> <u><i>waiting period</i></u> <b>(9–12 months)</b>	Bride remains in father's home. Often, groom builds a home.	Mary conceives by the Holy Spirit <b>during</b> this period
<b>Groom's choice if scandal happened</b>	Public accusation or quiet divorce.	Joseph plans a quiet divorce.
<b>Social cost</b>	Usually, social pressure decides the outcome.	Joseph's dream helps him choose her over his reputation.
<b>Groom joins bride</b> <u><i>Nissu'in</i></u>	Groom processes to bride's home, often at night with some fanfare.	Joseph connects with Mary with less fanfare
<b>Sexual relations</b>	They reunite in the bridechamber	Joseph abstains until after Jesus' birth.
<b>Public Wedding feast</b>	Multi-day Communal celebration	Muted at best and overshadowed by pregnancy
<b>The Household</b>	Couple lives together. children expected.	New life together amid a census and baby arriving in a stable.

Thank you for reading.

**Todd**